

THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

How will lawyers use social media in 2011?

After last week's article was published, a number of my online readers expressed surprise at some of my predictions as to how lawyers' use of social media would change in 2011. For that reason, I wanted to expand on my predictions and explain the reasons behind them.

First, I predicted that lawyers will still continue to find a use for substantive legal blogging even though blogging is on the decline for the general population (replaced instead by micro-blogging via sites like Twitter and Tumblr). Blogs serve lawyers well in a number of ways: they showcase lawyers' expertise, strengthen their online presence by increasing the search engine optimization for the lawyers' blog and websites and allow attorneys to express themselves — something most lawyers love to do!

That being said, I predict that the overall number of law blogs will remain steady or even decline. I believe that the legal blogging market reached its saturation point last year, with the rapid influx of new legal blogs flooding the online marketplace. Because of the increase in legal blogs, competition for readers is fierce and it is increasingly difficult for lawyers to identify topics to write about that haven't already been covered by other bloggers.

For that reason, new lawyer blogs will only increase slightly and a good number of existing ones will be abandoned by lawyers who have found that it wasn't worth their while to maintain a blog. Additionally, whereas blogging used to be viewed as a way to connect with other lawyers, that function is now being replaced by the networking capabilities of social media sites like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

Lawyer activity on those social networking sites will continue to increase. LinkedIn will see the largest increase, with lawyers setting up profiles at record levels. This is because LinkedIn is strictly a "professional" site and lawyers will feel most comfortable testing the online networking waters in that setting.

Facebook activity will also see a huge increase amongst lawyers. More and more will set up new profiles — many will do so with the goal of keeping in touch with family members, friends and college age children. However, the feasibility of professional networking will soon become apparent to this particular sub-group as they receive connection requests from other attorneys and professionals.

Facebook is increasingly becoming the place for online interaction and connection. People are joining the site in record numbers and its format easily facilitates the dissemination and dis-

cussion of relevant information, including blog posts and links to recent legal news.

In mid-2010, I remained unconvinced of the long-term relevance of Facebook to attorneys. But now, just 6 months later, in part because of the introduction of Facebook Pages for businesses, I am quite sure that Facebook is supplanting Twitter and LinkedIn as the most relevant and useful site for online networking.

Which brings me to Twitter. Twitter is by no means dead and will continue to be a huge force in social media, but its relevance to most attorneys and law firms is questionable. Twitter is primarily a source for the dissemination of information, since it is difficult to engage in and follow conversations on Twitter no matter what interface you use.

If you have been able to accumulate a large, loyal following of people who are actually interested in the content that you tweet about, it is a very useful platform on which to share information about your chosen topics, including your own blog posts and content. However, obtaining and maintaining a loyal, engaged group of followers is not an easy proposition, despite what some social media "experts" might have

you believe.

Therefore, I believe that in 2011, Twitter's relevance and utility to your typical attorney will be minimal at best. However, for those attorneys who enjoy technology news, who have a client base that uses Twitter, or who simply enjoy interacting in short bursts, Twitter may be a platform worth using — but it's not for everyone.

The bottom line: Social media is a rapidly changing landscape. What was relevant in 2010 may not be in 2011. And, you never know what's coming next. The next big platform that may replace all others in 2011 may very well be under development. Something new is always just around the corner.

So, who knows what 2011 will bring? I don't know about you, but I can't wait to find out.

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Daily Record
Columnist